

SINGAPORE PERSPECTIVES 2010

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Raffles City Convention Centre



IPS Singapore Perspectives 2010

Panel II: One Gracious Society

The Search for Graciousness

The search for “graciousness” ...

- must be seen as part and parcel of the government’s understanding of Singapore society as something to be perpetually shaped, polished and upgraded according to specific visions of the day;
- has been largely propelled by economic agenda or instrumentalist rationale;
- has shifted, over the years, from one of national consciousness towards that of a global city that has to welcome foreign talent and integrate new citizens.

Creating a “Civilized” and “Cultured” Society with the Arts

“For it used to be a common slander in the old days, that while the people of Malaysia, and in particular Singapore... that we’re good at making money, they’re indifferent to the finer graces of civilized life”.

- Yusof Ishak, 15th Annual
Exhibition of the Singapore Art
Society, Victoria Memorial Hall, 1964

Creating a “Civilized” and “Cultured” Society with the Arts

“Music, painting, drama, literature and a concern for beauty generally are what transforms a prosperous society into a civilized society. Without these Singapore remains not more than a prosperous and efficiently run *pasar malam*”.

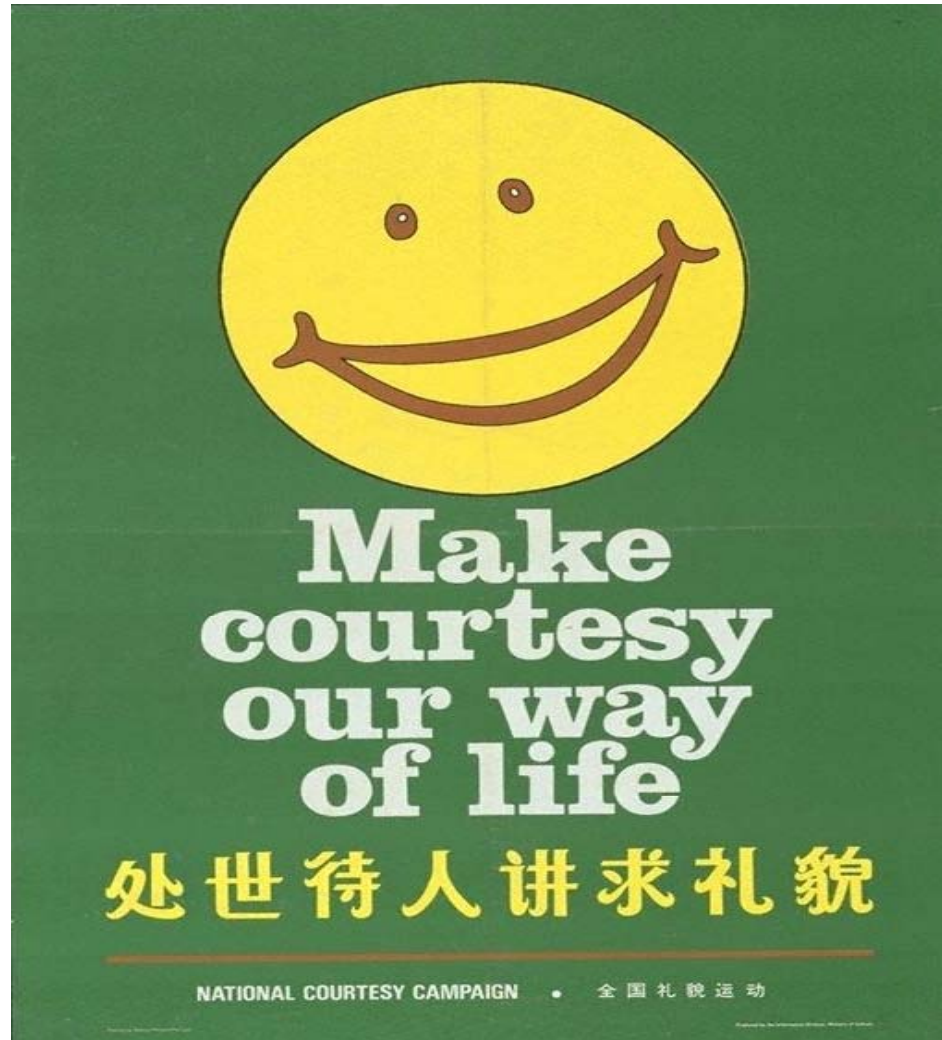
- S. Rajaratnam, opening of a Balinese exhibition, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 28 Dec 1971

Creating a “Civilized” and “Cultured” Society with the Arts

“Art generally can help make our domestic lives that much more pleasant and agreeable. Some of us become embarrassed when we are called “ugly Singaporeans”.

- Rahim Ishak, Senior Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, opening of Chinese painting exhibition, 6 Dec 1977

National Courtesy Campaign (1979)



Source: National Archives

Pre-1979 “courtesy” campaigns:

- Bus Safety and Courtesy Campaign (1968)
- National “Safety First” Council Road Courtesy Campaigns (1972-1973)
- Safety and Courtesy Campaign Week (1972 -1973)
- Singapore Tourist Promotion Board (1978)

“Last year the Tourist Promotion Board launched a courtesy campaign to make Singaporeans more polite to tourists. I followed the campaign with interest and amusement: interest because most people were responsive to the campaign; amusement because no one protested that it was absurd to teach Singaporeans to be polite only to tourists.”

- MM Lee Kuan Yew, launch of National Courtesy Campaign, 1 June 1979

National Courtesy Campaign (1979)



Source: National Archives

Conclusion

- Past campaigns were aimed at Singaporeans *for* Singaporeans;
- More frequent oscillation between national identity and the demands of a global city in recent years;
- Campaigns to be “gracious” increasingly driven by issues such as integration of foreigners with locals and the need to expand the economy vis-à-vis “foreign talent”.